

The Thirties

the society's or civilisation's to which one happened to belong, is theatre; a lurid melodrama or soap-opera with history for its theme. Such an attitude of mind is, of course, common enough, both among the ever increasing number of the mentally deranged with lost identities, and among mystics and religious *exahts*—the Kierkegaards and Kafkas down to the crazier specimens like Black Moslems and Jehovah's Witnesses. Politically, its commonest manifestation is one version or another of anarchism.

As it has afflicted me, I have been unable to take completely seriously, and therefore to believe in the validity or permanence of, any form of authority. Crowns and mitres have seemed to be made of tinsel, ceremonial robes to have been hastily procured in a theatrical costumier's, what passes for great oratory to have been mugged up from the worst of Shakespeare. Feeling thus, I could not but assume that everything pertaining to this aspect of life must shortly come to an end. It was too absurd, too threadbare, too moth-eaten to endure. George Orwell similarly was liable to break off a conversation to make statements like: 'Eton's doomed', or, 'Soon there won't be any more state openings of Parliament'.

Such a disposition made one ostensibly irreverent, pessimistic, disloyal, and—the commonest accusation—destructive in attitude of mind. In the war, when I was with V Corps at Salisbury, I was turned out of a mess by the A.P.M., a Northern Irishman named McNally who happened to be Mess President, on the ground that I talked. When I pressed him to be more specific,

he refused to be drawn. 'It's just your talk,' he
said. I mention
this temperamental incapacity to accept the
pretensions, or even
the reality, of power in any of its manifestations
(which, incidentally, has made me a hopeless failure as an
executive, and
unsatisfactory in all roles which require ardour and
decision, like
citizen and lover), because it obviously affects
one's view of
what is going on in the world and of the people
who are con-
ducting the world's affairs. If, as I often think,
power is to the
collectivity what sex is to the individual, then
journalists like
myself are, as it were, power-i/oyewrs, whose
judgments will